(319)

UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
LIMITED

CEDAW/C/1996/L.1/Add.4/Rev.1
30 January 1996
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/SPANISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Fifteenth session
15 January-2 February 1996

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Hanna Beate SCHÖPP-SCHILLING (Germany)

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

2. Initial and second periodic reports

Paraguay

1. The Committee considered the initial and second periodic reports of Paraguay (CEDAW/C/PAR/1 and 2 and Add.1 and 2) at its 289th and 297th meetings, on 17 and 23 January 1996 (see CEDAW/C/SR.289 and 297). The Committee took note of the answers given orally to the wide range of questions and concerns raised during consideration of the report.

2. In introducing the combined report, the representative of Paraguay noted that since 1992 a number of important political changes had taken place in the country. She emphasized the adoption of a new Constitution and the election of a civilian Government. In 1992, the position of Secretary of State for Women was established.

3. The representative indicated that in the new Constitution the principle of equality had been adopted and the relevant international instruments had been ratified. This allowed the creation of a body of law on equality between women and men. However, disparities in equality in legislation still existed.

4. The representative gave details of several programmes that the Government, non-governmental organizations and women's organizations had been implementing. Despite gains made in women's education, 6 out of 10 illiterate persons in the country were women, mainly from rural areas, and the levels of school retention were very low, especially for girls. The country had one of the highest rates of maternal death in the Latin American region, with abortion being the second most common cause of maternal death.

5. The proportion of women heads of households was very high and those households tended to be among the poorest. There had been some improvements in the granting of loans to women for micro-enterprises, as well as for housing. While segregation of jobs and education was easing and stereotyping in educational materials was being examined, disparities in economic activity and remuneration between women and men were very high. Some measures had been introduced to penalize and prevent violence against women, to regulate prostitution and to provide education on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

6. The representative pointed out that one of the most visible changes in the past years had been the participation of women in politics. Several political parties, as well as the Parliament and local authorities, were in the process of introducing quotas for women.

7. The representative stressed that her Government held the conviction that neither development nor democracy were possible without the participation of women.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

8. The Committee expressed its satisfaction with the high-level representation and Paraguay's effort in submitting the report and the addenda promptly, which reflected an intention to comply with submission procedures, provide updated information and initiate a dialogue with the Committee that would enable better interpretation of the Convention. The Committee also noted the comprehensive and detailed nature of the oral presentation, which complemented the written reports and answered the questions raised by the experts.

9. Satisfaction was also expressed with the report's frankness, reflecting situations and problems in conflict with the articles of the Convention. The Committee highlighted the scale of the effort represented by submission of the report for a country embarking on a democratic process after a long dictatorship. It welcomed the fact that, apart from the Government, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions had also participated in drafting the report.

Factors obstructing implementation of the Convention

10. The Committee recognized that various factors were holding up implementation of the Convention. Particularly relevant were the country's limited economic capacities and its dependence on farm production, which had only very recently begun to be modernized; high rates of poverty and marginalization among the population; the institutional and cultural consequences of the prolonged dictatorship; and the existence of a very traditional and hierarchical society. Paraguay was currently going through a period of transition, where the new structures of democracy and the rule of law were still being defined, which led to difficulties in applying the policies promoted by the Convention.

Positive aspects

11. The Committee noted that the new Constitution enshrined the principle of equality between men and women, as well as reforms of the Labour and Electoral Codes.

12. The Committee also noted the Government's early recognition of the importance of women for the country's development and the creation of the Office of the Secretary of State for Women to coordinate official policies for that sector of the population.

13. The Committee further noted the importance attached by the Government to its commitment under the Beijing Platform for Action and, in particular, its initiative to adopt a gender approach in policies and programmes, as well as to heighten the awareness of administrative personnel in that connection.

14. The Committee noted the Government's recognition of the serious problem of violence against women, which had been declared a public health problem.

15. The Committee also noted the level of development of women's organizations and their commitment to the advancement of women.

16. The Committee further noted the initiatives and efforts of both non-governmental organizations and the Government to broaden the political participation of women and the proposal to establish a law on quotas and to oblige all political parties to establish a minimum number of women in their electoral lists.

Principal subjects of concern

17. The Committee was concerned that the country's legislation maintained discriminatory provisions in conflict with the constitutional principle of equality. Despite the progress made in certain codes, both civil and penal legislation needed major changes to incorporate the rights laid down in the Convention and those emanating from the Constitution.

18. The Committee was concerned at the limited mandate and resources of the Office of the Secretary of State for Women and its apparent lower ranking in the political and administrative hierarchy in relation to other ministries. In that

connection, the Committee expressed its surprise that the Secretary of State for Women should be excluded from meetings of the Cabinet of Ministers, which constituted a form of discrimination.

19. The Committee expressed great concern at the high level of easily preventable maternal mortality - one of the highest in the region - and of extremely unsafe abortions, especially among very young girls, as well as the high fertility rate and limited access to basic health and family planning services. It stressed that this situation was particularly serious among rural women, most of whom did not benefit from the right to health guaranteed by the Convention.

20. The Committee acknowledged the State party's initiatives to provide bilingual education but expressed its concern at the inadequacy of those initiatives, which posed a major obstacle to women's access to social and economic opportunities, since a large percentage of the female population spoke only Guaraní, the predominant aboriginal language. The high illiteracy and drop-out rates were considered major impediments to the advancement of women.

21. With regard to violence against women, the Committee expressed great concern at the extent of the problem and the inadequacy of legal and administrative measures to combat it, protect victims and punish the perpetrators. The Committee also devoted considerable attention to the country's critical situation with regard to prostitution and the alarming levels of this practice among girls and very young women. It emphasized the fact that procurers went unpunished and regretted that the grave socio-economic conditions in which many women lived led them to become prostitutes. The Committee also expressed particular concern at the number of legal and administrative errors in cases of adoption, which perpetuated the undesirable international traffic in girls and boys.

22. The Committee expressed its serious concern at the situation of rural women, who constituted the majority of the country's female population and whose living conditions were characterized by a lack of primary health care, limited access to education and a high drop-out rate. In addition, women faced legal and cultural barriers that prevented them from owning property and they were almost completely excluded from the decision-making process; there were also profound disparities between men's and women's wages, to the detriment of women.

Suggestions and recommendations

23. The Committee urged the State party to continue its initiatives with a view to updating its national legislation in order to make it compatible with the constitutional principle of equality and the articles of the Convention. In that regard, it recommended that the State party make special efforts to revise the Penal Code and related laws in the light of general recommendation 19 on violence against women. 1/

24. The Committee recommended that the State party strengthen the political status and the economic and administrative aspects of the national mechanism (Office of the Secretary of State for Women) in accordance with article 7 of the Convention.

25. The Committee appreciated the State party's efforts to implement the quota system in decision-making bodies and recommended that that system be adopted and implemented in all possible areas and at all possible levels, including by public authorities, political parties, unions and other organizations of civil society, in accordance with the provisions of article 7 of the Convention.

26. The Committee recommended that the State party strengthen and broaden its initiatives to extend bilingual education to all citizens, in particular women, and to combat the social, economic and cultural factors causing the high drop-out and illiteracy rates among women, in accordance with the provisions of article 10 of the Convention.

27. The Committee called upon the State party to fulfil its obligations with respect to all the rights set out in article 12 of the Convention. It stressed the urgency for the State party to take measures to deal with the high level of maternal mortality and illegal abortions and to consider reviewing the punitive measures of the law of abortion, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action. It also recommended that the State party provide sufficient and adequate family planning services and information.

28. The Committee recommended that the State party increase its efforts to guarantee equality in land distribution and ownership and in all aspects of its productive use, in accordance with articles 11, 14 and 16 of the Convention.

29. The Committee recommended the wide dissemination of the Convention, primarily among women and in particular among rural and indigenous people.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/47/38), chap. I.